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ABSTRACT

At the elementary school level, promising new early intervention programs, such as the Reading Recovery Program (RRP), show ways to succeed with students in the primary grades. The RRP targeted the poorest readers in a first grade class, who were given supplemental, one-to-one planned lessons for 30 minutes each day by a specially trained teacher. The program demonstrated that most participating students were able to keep up with their class after 15-20 weeks in the program. Such programs challenge educators to review their expectations and reconsider what are the most appropriate modes of instruction for at-risk students. In order to strengthen intervention and to prevent problems for disadvantaged students later on, Arizona's legislature earmarked \$3 million for competitive grants. The funding was to be awarded in increments of up to \$250,000 to school districts that developed projects to identify and test effective early interventions with at-risk students. This information brief profiles three Arizona schools that received the funding: the summer school at Ash Fork, the before- and after-school programs at Littleton, and the school-within-a-school in Ganado. Each of the schools is characterized by a challenging student population and is the lone elementary school in a small district. In each school, themes such as concentrated staff effort, enriched curriculum, and extended quality time are prominent. (RH)

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Early Intervention for Students At Risk: Three Profiles from Arizona's Rural Schools

Nikola Filby and Vicki Lambert

"Catch them early" is good advice when it comes to helping students at risk. Often, students have fallen behind in school, experienced failure, and become frustrated before they are given extra help. This may be too late. Early, intensive intervention can prevent problems from escalating, produce results more quickly, and save everyone time, effort, and money in the long run. As our grandmothers used to say, "A stitch in time saves nine."

Early intervention is advocated by researchers who have studied Chapter 1 and other programs that target extra funds toward students at risk. Guthrie et al. (1989) cite intensive early intervention as one of five principles to guide design of effective Chapter 1 programs.

Preschool educators have long sought support for their programs using an early intervention argument, and evidence is now coming in to support their claims. Two major studies of the long-term effects of preschool (Berrueta-Clement et al., 1984; Lally et al., 1988) document "changed lives," as adolescents lead more productive lives, avoid trouble with the law, and save taxpayers money.

At the elementary school level, promising new programs show how we can succeed with students in the early grades. One of the most successful is the Reading Recovery Program (see Boehnlein, 1987). This program targets the poorest readers in a first grade class who, in addition to their regular classroom activities, are provided one-to-one planned lessons for 30 minutes each day by a specially trained teacher.

"Children practice reading and rereading many easy books with interesting stories in natural language. They also write sentences and stories, learning to hear sounds in words and gradually to spell them correctly. Most important, children develop independent reading strategies that enable them to learn at an average level in their regular classroom" (Boehnlein, 1987, p. 33).

"Reading Recovery children not only made greater gains than the other high-risk children who received no help, but they also made greater gains than the children who needed no help."

Evaluations of Reading Recovery show that most students are, in fact, able to keep up with their class after 15 to 20 weeks in the program. Perhaps even more illuminating: "Reading Recovery children not only made greater gains than the other high-risk children who received no help, but they also made greater gains than the children who needed no help" (Boehnlein, 1987).

This program, and others like it, challenge several prevailing assumptions and practices. First, they challenge us to review our expectations. Too often, "at-risk" is translated as "low ability." If we expect these students to be slower and do less, then surely they will achieve less — a self-fulfilling prophecy. Instead, we should expect them to be curious, lively, sense-making children, and look for ways to reach and teach them.

A second challenge is to the mode of instruction. Much of the instruction children receive is organized around textbooks and worksheets. Students who are having difficulty are given more "remedial work," often drill and practice on simple skill worksheets. Perhaps this is part of the problem. These students may need more, not less, active, meaningful work. They need to read real books and write early and often. They need to use math skills in real world applications. They need experience-based projects. By calling these things "higher-order thinking" and application tasks, we have fooled ourselves into believing that they have to be saved until more "basic" skills are mastered. Instead, they may be the fundamental elements of good instruction that provide motivation for skills acquisition.

The third challenge is to our hope that a little rearrangement of the normal procedure will be enough. Although students may graduate from Reading Recovery in 15 to 20 weeks, they will by then have received only 40 hours of one-on-one instruction in addition to their regular program. These students still need an extra boost. They need more high-quality instructional time. And they need a school system that will invest in staff training and program costs to provide that boost.

For another look at challenging assumptions see "Better Schooling for the Children of Poverty: Alternatives to Conventional Wisdom," (Knapp & Turnbull, 1990).

Action in Arizona

The state of Arizona is taking the issue of early intervention seriously. State education policymakers have decided that the best hope for disadvantaged students lies in prevention. Rather than waiting for students to fail and then attempting remediation, Arizona schools are being asked to focus on intervention in the primary grades. By helping students experience early success, educators aim to establish a longterm pattern of success in school and beyond.

Arizona's initial legislative approach was to provide special academic assistance money to all districts on the basis of K-3 enrollment. But concerns arose over a lack of clear spending and evaluation guidelines, and an enrollment-based allocation formula that gave small rural districts too little money for major impact. So in the spring of 1988, the legislature issued a refinement. It earmarked \$3 million to be granted in increments of up to \$250,000 to districts through a competitive process. This would launch four-year pilot projects to be followed and evaluated. The goal was to test out and identify approaches that really worked for early intervention with students at risk.

Eighty districts with a high proportion of at-risk students were

selected as eligible to apply for the pilot grants. Many of these were small rural districts. Local educators met in planning groups to consider what programs they needed to meet local needs. They were provided some assistance in the form of evaluation criteria, workshops and resource materials, but the focus was on local initiative and problem solving.

Twenty-two districts were selected on the basis of the grants competition; additional funding since then has allowed 19 additional districts to join in. The projects began implementation in 1989 and many are just beginning ambitious new programs that will take full use of the four-year timeline to become fully established. The entire effort is being evaluated by Morrison Institute, a policy research center affiliated with Arizona State University.

In this *Brief* we highlight profiles of three schools. Each is the lone elementary school in its small district. Each has a challenging student population to work with. Each illustrates an interesting approach to early intervention. The themes that we saw above — themes such as concentrated staff effort, enriched curriculum, and extended quality time — are played out in a rural setting and with the distinctive touches of real life.

Developmentally Appropriate Practices

One key resource for Arizona grant writers was a set of guidelines published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. A booklet entitled "Appropriate Education in the Primary Grades" describes developmentally appropriate practices and contrasts them with inappropriate practices. Consider this example of appropriate teaching strategies:

"The curriculum is integrated so that learning occurs primarily through projects, learning centers, and playful activities that reflect current interests of children. For

example, a social studies project such as building and operating a store, or a science project such as furnishing and caring for an aquarium provides focused opportunities for children to plan, dictate, and/or write their plans (using invented and teacher-taught spelling), to draw and write about their activity, to discuss what they are doing, to read nonfiction books for needed information, to work cooperatively with other children, to learn facts in a meaningful context, and to enjoy learning. Skills are taught as needed to accomplish projects."

Summer School at Ash Fork

Ash Fork, a small community of approximately 650 residents, is located almost 200 miles from Phoenix. The nearest city in any direction is 50 miles. Most people in the community are self-employed, working the stoneyard to produce flagstone. Most have low incomes.

The school district serves grades K-12 and is housed in one school. There are 170 students in the school, 130 of them in grades K-6. There is one class per grade / level, averaging 15 students per class; 27 students are currently enrolled in kindergarten, which is taught by two teachers.

In November 1988, the five lower-grade teachers (K-3) decided to apply for the pilot grant money made available by the state. Their plan was to offer a summer enrichment program for at-risk students "one that would provide real-life experiences to back up the material they read and talked about in class. As one teacher noted, references to simple activities such as riding an elevator or growing plants and vegetables had no real meaning for these students, most of whom had no direct experience of either. Their proposal was accepted, and the summer of 1990 saw the first session carried out.

In preparation for teaching this summer school, the two teachers received inservice training in whole-language instruction. They learned more about how to make connections from one content area to another and, whenever possible, to make connections with real life. They planned reading and writing activities with "big" books, working on maps, and using math as a complement to all the activities. "We want the students to become involved in learning and to like it," stated the coordinator. "We have high expectations for this program."

Students were preselected for the program. The person assigned to coordinate the grant met individually with each teacher to solicit names of students that would most benefit from additional instruction. Letters were then mailed home to parents, outlining the program and asking whether they would like to enroll their child. Teachers stressed the importance of having

the student and parents decide on attendance. "We never say that your child must go to summer school."

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Ash Fork's six-week summer school operated on a two by two schedule: two weeks of instruction followed by two weeks off. Students could attend all six weeks or only two. As the coordinator explained, "We would like to have all the students there the entire time, but that just doesn't work out for everyone. Some of the parents have already made plans." The two on, two off schedule was made primarily for student morale, the coordinator stated, but also because it allowed distinct blocks of time to be devoted to a given theme as is done in the school year curriculum.

Attendance was good, but they did learn one thing about scheduling. During the regular school year, there is no school on Fridays. Summer school was scheduled Monday through Friday, since each session was already so short. But parents and students had a hard time making the adjustment. Friday attendance was low, and staff are going to take a serious look at eliminating Fridays next year.

The two teachers in the summer program (one teaches kindergarten and first-grade students, the other teaches second- and third-grade students) regard the summer session as an extension of their regular program. One two-week unit, for example, focused on Mexico. Students learned about Mexican food, customs, songs, language, and geography. On Fridays, the two teachers brought their classes together for field trips.

Many of the students had never been out of Ash Fork, the coordinator said. A trip to Phoenix was a tremen-

dous experience, especially riding the elevator! Similarly, many students had never been to a nice restaurant, and they got the chance on one of their trips. "We want the students to know that there's life outside of Ash Fork."

Many of the summer school experiences were designed to engage the whole family. For example, during a nutrition unit, the students grew radishes and took them home. The teachers believe that any time student activities can be shared with family members it will help bond them to the school and to the learning process.

Before and After School Programs in Littleton

This program was designed to reach those students in grades two through six who were not motivated — not working — to their potential. Although the school already had several excellent programs in place for many of these same students, teachers felt that existing programs were not enough. They wanted more. The way they got more was to provide two additional programs, one before school, and one after school.

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The program is designed to be tutorial in nature, and attendance is voluntary. The way the morning program works is one hour before classes begin a teacher and a bilingual aide meet with students who show up for assistance with their classwork and/or homework. (The library is already open, so there is ready access to books and materials.) Approximately eight to eleven students show up each morning, many of them "regulars." The whole school knows that these services are available, and many students are encouraged by their teachers to make use of them. For some students, the decision to do so is as simple as going home at night and discovering that the homework assignment is too hard.

Teachers feel that the morning tutorial program has been successful. They are pleased with the student response and with their progress. "Perhaps the best thing that occurs with this program," stated the director, "is that students get one-on-one attention. That makes them feel better about themselves. Self-esteem promotes learning and learning promotes self-esteem. The two feed each other."

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The afternoon program is much more structured than the morning sessions. Approximately 86 students are involved, together with 10 teachers, two per grade level. The program is available Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays (Wednesdays are minimum days, and Fridays typically don't get the same attendance). Students are identified for the program by teacher referral and test scores, then "invited" to attend. "We use a 'you-have-been-chosen' approach, and it seems to work."

Although still tutorial in its approach, the afternoon program is primarily aimed at reading and language skills. At the same time, the teachers have worked hard to ensure that the program doesn't degrade into just piling on more and more workbook pages for the students to complete. As one teacher put it, "We're using the same skills, yes, but we're connecting them with different activities from those used in our regular curriculum."

There are no texts for the classes. Teachers are to design their own materials with the needs of each student in mind. "Even cooking is included, if the teacher feels it will benefit," stated the director. "One third-grade teacher designed a unit around sewing. She taught the students how to make patterns, how to measure, how to plan, how to sew, then had them put on a play with their finished products. The students loved it!"

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Teachers are currently in the process of evaluating both the morning and the afternoon programs. So far, despite some drawbacks (the teaching staff fully recognizes that "We have some definite growing pains," as the director put it), the teachers see two very distinct advantages. First, with only eight students per class (who, by the way, remain with the same instructor throughout the year) teachers can provide a lot of one-on-one instruction. Second, the smaller numbers allow teachers to look closely and carefully at individual student needs. "It's almost like they write an individual plan for each student," said the program director.

Two major problem areas identified by the director are, first, the tendency among several teachers, despite their best intentions, to turn their instruction into "skill and drill" exercises. Although the director recognizes that it takes a special attitude to function without a textbook, she wants teachers to break out of their conventional ways of working and find ways to bring knowledge to life. Second, she sees that many deserving students are not presently being served. "We want more focus on the 'pick-up' kid," she explained. "You know, the average student who may be held back by a specific weakness in one area."

The district has been very supportive of the program, to the point of providing teachers with inservice training in self-esteem and cooperative learning "important aspects of the whole program in the director's view. In addition, the district is paying teachers for the time and energy they

are devoting to making their recommendations for the continuance of the program and planning for the next year. All in all, according to the director, "I think we are working well together with a common goal to be achieved."

School-within-a-School in Ganado

Ganado Primary School, located on a Navajo reservation in northeast Arizona, serves 423 K-2 students. A whopping 97 percent of the school population is classified as at risk, a fact which, in the words of one teacher, "poses some very distinct problems."

On the other hand, Ganado has some very distinct things going for it. Class sizes, for example, are reasonable (approximately 15 kindergartners in each of the eight classes and approximately 22 students in each of the seven first- and second-grade classes). But, of far more significance, and perhaps because of its high at-risk population, Ganado has long been active in addressing the problems of its educationally deprived students. Under its dedicated principal of the past ten years, Sig Bolo, and because of what he regards as a "very progressive" culture at Ganado, one in which teachers are constantly on the alert for new ways of working with their students, Ganado achieved the goal this year of being one of six finalists in the NCTE/Sears Foundation competition for National Excellence in Service to At-Risk Students.

Programs already in place at the time Bolo and his staff adopted the school-within-a-school model are many and diverse. There is a Play Seminar, where students are videotaped as they play, allowing teachers to review the tape at a later time and discuss their observations with regard to the children's behavior and language facility; the Writing Circle, where students pass their work around, each one adding to the work of the student seated next to him/her in the circle; the Success Program, where all of Ganado's special-education students join regular mainstream classes with their resource teacher who team-teaches with the regular

instructors; the Drama and Visualization Program where students practice visualizing their future success, and, finally, there is a Parent Involvement Workshop that brings parents and students together once a month to work on goals and objectives they work out together.

The latest venture, the school-within-a-school model, was something one of the teachers had read about in a flyer describing a program that was working in Germany. Essentially, the plan is to keep students with the same teacher as they progress from grade to grade. For at-risk students, in particular, the program gives them the needed sense of ownership of their school and social bonding with each other and the teachers, and provides continuity often lacking in their lives.

The teachers were quick to get behind this working model and adapt it to something that would work for Ganado students. After many planning meetings throughout the 1988-89 school year, the participating teachers were identified and the curriculum was in place. The final decision was to take three of the eight kindergarten classes and track them into two identified first-grade classes which, in turn, would feed into two identified second-grade classes. The School-within-a-School was officially launched in the 1989-90 school year.

A word should be said about the placement of students. Although by and large each student in the program could look ahead and know who his or her teacher would be the next year, the teachers were careful to avoid rigid tracking that would overlook individual student needs. In the open communication among teachers that this program engendered, there was much back-and-forth discussion of each student, as well as of teaching styles and special situations that might call for special solutions.

For example, one teacher noticed that several of his students responded particularly well to a male teacher and felt it important to keep them with a male role model in subsequent grades. Another could see that some of their students would do better under

teacher whose approach was more structured rather than the one whose style was more open-ended.

The opportunities for teachers to make these critical observations came from various sources: frequent discussions about students between the "sending" teacher and the "receiving" teacher, teacher review of videotaped classes, and comments provided on "transfer cards" that program planners had devised as a way to transmit important information (strengths of the child as well as special problems) to the receiving teacher. Indeed, one of the teachers benefited particularly from watching a two-and-a-half hour videotape of the children he was about to receive into his class. Not only did he become familiar with the students as individuals, but for the first time he saw them in a developmental perspective. As he put it, "It has certainly broadened my understanding of the whole learning process."

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Early on, the teachers at Ganado recognized the importance to their students of having similar rules, expectations, and requirements, even though they were flexible when it came to applying them. To achieve continuity in the curriculum and, particularly, to assure students of moving comfortably from one grade to the next, the seven participating teachers met formally once a month and informally on many more

occasions, often getting together for breakfast or lunch. In these sessions, they planned everything from the thematic structures to be used in class to recommendations for take-home reading. As one teacher stated, "We're doing so much more together than we ever did before."

The camaraderie that has developed among participating teachers is a source of great satisfaction to them. They all remark on the close ties that the School-within-a-School has brought about. They also have commented on the degree of freedom they have been given to make key decisions and to provide direction for the program. In large measure, the autonomy they enjoy reflects on the principal, who believes strongly in teacher empowerment.

In addition to the bonding evident among Ganado's program teachers, they also have remarked on what the program has accomplished in bringing together the different grade-level students. "To smooth the transition of our kids from one grade to another," said one of the kindergarten teachers, "the older children routinely come into our classroom. They like to read the books they've created to our kindergartners. My youngsters were so turned on that right away they asked to make their own little books. And they learned the process much faster than when I worked with them alone."

As a result of her experiences, this teacher strongly supported using older students in this way. "Not only are they natural teachers," she commented, "but the kids enjoy learning from them. As for me, the whole experience really changed my ideas regarding my responsibilities as a teacher. Observing how other teachers worked and played so differently from me was another eye-opener. I got to see that children learn from many people. It helped me to loosen up as a teacher."

The principal and teachers alike at Ganado feel that the program has been very successful and holds great promise for the future. Not only has it fostered common interests among the teachers, it has enabled individual

teachers to recognize more forcefully what it means, for them and for their students, to be part of a team effort.

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For the students in School-within-a-School, there is no question that the program has strengthened their identification with the school, with each other, and with their teachers.

One of the greatest advantages of School-within-a-School in the eyes of the principal has been that of accountability. Specific problem areas can be more easily and quickly identified, and, because the program doesn't operate in a finger-pointing climate, solutions can be worked out in a spirit of goodwill and cooperation. Everyone wants the best for the students.

The teachers agree that the entire school could benefit from being in the program, although they also agree that the whole undertaking demands "an enormous amount of work." Time was a big issue for all of them. "And short-term planning doesn't do it. I'm looking at a six-month block as a minimum," said one participating teacher. Lack of time for another meant not being able to visit each other's classrooms often enough to talk with students and teachers and to observe their activities to the extent she would like. It was the suggestion of this teacher that time be set aside toward the latter part of the year for students to remain in their new teacher's classroom for a two- or three-week period in preparation for their upcoming year.

Other concerns had to do with matters of participation. "Some teachers just don't want to be involved," said one. "They want to stay

in their own classrooms." Two other teachers mentioned the problem of personality conflicts arising between and among teachers. Both the principal and the teachers agreed that using a sociogram as one way to select and pair teachers in the program would be useful in this regard.

Despite these hesitations ("I'm not sure that the finished product met any of our early visions"), the overall appraisal from the teachers was positive. The principal expressed great faith in the ability of Ganado's teachers to capitalize on what they had already developed in this first year of operation. "I've been the principal here for 10 years, and this is one of the most promising things I've seen come along. I would say that Ganado's teachers are probably no better or worse than teachers anywhere, but the students in this program are going to be the best students in the school."



The three schools highlighted in this Brief can be contacted for further information:

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Littleton Before/After School

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Ganado School Within a School

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State K-3 Programs

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